

Town Poised to Purchase Camp Wing

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Selectmen and the Conservation Commission announced this week that the town has negotiated to purchase 354 acres of land known as Camp Wing off of Keene St. in northwest Duxbury for \$1.56 million and will likely seek a Proposition 2 1/2 override to fund it.

A Proposition 2 1/2 "debt exclusion" requires approval by a special town meeting vote and then approval by ballot election. The definition of a debt exclusion is that the town's levy limit — the revenue raised from real and personal property taxes — is temporarily increased only for the amount voted, according to a list of Proposition 2 1/2 terms in the back of the annual town meeting warrant.

A vote on Camp Wing, which would be used for conservation land, will not be included in the annual town meeting on March 14, because the town does not yet have a purchase and sale agreement for the property, but the owner, Crossroads for Kids, Inc., has accepted the town's offer. Over the next several weeks, a purchase and sale

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agreement will be hammered out, said selectmen. The town has been negotiating to buy Camp Wing for a year and very often selectmen have met in executive session with commissioners and town counsel about it. A press release from selectmen said the town had based its negotiations on a full appraisal done by an appraiser hired by the town.

Duxbury's Conservation Administrator Joe Grady said the town has kept its eye on the Camp Wing land for over 30 years because it is one of the largest remaining undeveloped parcels in town. Crossroads for Kids, Inc., decided to sell 354 acres out of its total 620 acres because "they are land rich and cash poor," said Grady.

"They truly want the town to purchase the land," Grady said. He added that the owners have stressed that "they must turn the land into cash" and if the town does not approve the purchase at both the special town meeting or on the ballot, then there are developers waiting to make offers on it.

Grady said he does not yet have figures on how much a Proposition 2 1/2 override would affect a homeowner's annual tax bill, but is working on that. He said he and the Conservation Commission "will do everything in our power" to try to get state funding for the purchase.

He likened the Camp Wing purchase to the 1986 acquisition of the Waiting Hill Preserve, which cost \$3.6 million. The state gave Duxbury \$1 million for to purchase that land, which abuts the North Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. Grady added that the note for Waiting Hill will expire by 2002.

"We are elated," said Selectmen Chairman Margaret Kearney and she congratulated the Conservation Commission on their efforts to purchase this property.

Selectman Friend Weiler echoed Kearney's thoughts: "We're very, very excited about Camp Wing," he said.

Grady and the Conservation Commission said Camp Wing is an important piece of conservation land because it contains the junction of 2 tributaries, the headwaters of the South River and that it has a protected wetlands in the middle of it. It is home to several endangered species and "it's loaded with wildlife," Grady said, listing deer, coyotes, otter and mink, which live there. Also, the land is in the Zone 2 water protection district for a well in Marshfield.

Grady said Crossroads for Kids, Inc., will continue to operate a camp from their land on the west side of Keene St. and may even expand at some point.

In related business, the Conservation Commission outlined their town meeting warrant articles for selectmen.

In Article 28, commissioners are seeking money to be

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added to their Conservation Fund to buy land. They would like to bring the fund back up to its \$100,000 level of last year and would need \$80,000 to do so. The Conservation Commission used the fund to buy 3 parcels of conservation land last year. They are a 5 acre parcel off Barnswallow Lane for \$20,000; a 4.78 acre parcel near Moduc St. for \$18,600; and a 2 acre parcel in the Aquifer Overlay Protection District for \$24,000.

In Article 29, the Conservation Commission would like the town to spend \$576,500 to buy 3 properties. The first is 4.76 acres on Summer St., that provides an open farm vista and historic sites, including a cow tunnel and barn, for \$122,700.

The second is 4.3 acres on Mayflower St. for aquifer protection for \$350,000. This could be developed into 4 house lots.

The third parcel is 11 acres on Union Street that fills in a missing corner of 70 acres of conservation land for \$103,800.

Commissioners did not have a clear plan for funding the purchase of these properties.

In other business, selectmen voted 2 to 1 to support Article 27, which would change the bylaw and turn the town clerk position from elected to appointed. Selectman Andre Martecchini was against this article because he said he supports the democratic process through elected positions like this one. Kearney and Weiler said by changing the position to an appointed one, the town managers could make sure they hired someone with qualifications to meet all the requirements of the town clerk, which have become increasingly complex in recent years. They could also more easily fire the person in the position as well.